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Mr R. W. J. J. J.
TRUTH AS IN JESUS.

CONVENTION SERMON.

BY
C. GOODSPEED.

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TRUTH AS IN JESUS.

Eph. iv. 21—"As truth is in Jesus."

"What is truth?" has been the question of the ages. There has ever been a conviction which permitted no questioning, that truth of all kinds was unspeakably precious, and must be sought at all costs and held at all sacrifice.

But it has been in the realm we vaguely call spiritual that truth has been felt to be of supreme moment, and its quest of surpassing importance, for there questions of tremendous import confront the thoughtful soul. Is there an existence beyond this in which the longings and forebodings of my deepest self may be realized? Is there a Being behind all things who answers to my sense of the supreme obligation to holiness, and who is the infinite and perfect one my soul craves as an object of worship? Are my sense of guilt and my fear of penalty but the shadow of a still more dread reality? If there be a life beyond this, shall goodness and blessedness there meet in eternal embrace, and guilt and punishment be indissolubly united? If there be a counterpart of my conscience, and a threatening storm cloud of wrath hangs over the guilty, is there any way of escape? If I have severed the connection between myself and God, is there any way to renew the blessed bond? If my soul is soiled and shattered and helpless, is there any all-sufficient aid?

Confronted by grand and dread questions like these, is it any wonder that men have peered with deadly intensity into the heavens to find a rift in the pall of darkness which had settled down upon the world, through which they might catch a glimpse of a glorious, or even a dread, destiny awaiting them, and to have a vision of God?

Away back in Ur of the Chaldees, an old book tells us, the rift came, and through the rift came a voice from the unseen. Increasing multitudes have continued to believe that the rift kept widening until, in the life and

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teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, the heavens became all aglow with light which has been shining with steady and serene splendor ever since.

But we have fallen upon a time of questioning. In the realm of the physical and of much that pertains to the psychical, old ideas have gone down before the rush of the new. Many are impatient of the thought that religious beliefs which come down from hoary antiquity should still claim the homage of the world, and great waves of doubt which have swept away faith in other old conceptions are tossing their foam up against the foundations of "truth as in Jesus."

May I be pardoned, then, if on an occasion like the present, I go aside from more directly practical topics, to one on which the very motive and impulse to all earnest activity depend, and venture, all too briefly and inadequately, to discuss some questions as to truth as in Jesus as it is face to face with the questionings of the time. I can only beg that you will not think me too presumptuous.

On the very threshold we meet our first question, striking at the very roots of Christianity. It is :

I. IS THERE TRUTH IN JESUS OF WHICH WE ARE CERTAIN?

Those who have read the articles of Schmiedel, or even of Bruce in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, or the works of Moffatt, or even of Gilbert and McGifford and writers of that school, know how far reaching are the questionings which are abroad. They cover such as these : Did the real Jesus of Nazareth correspond to the picture given us in the Gospels ? Have we a true record of his teachings ? Did he do the works which are there ascribed to Him ? Is there given us in the New Testament a right interpretation of his person and work ? No danger of wreck of the most cherished hopes should deter us from facing the issue of fair investigation. It is better to know the truth, although it rob us of all we hold most dear and sacred, and plunge our soul into gloom and darkness, than to hug an illusion, however glittering it may be.

One line of thought has always been most re-assuring, and its force still abides. It is this—the impossibility of explaining the Gospels unless they are the true record of what the Jesus of Nazareth there spoken of was, and did,

and taught. The character of Him there limned in myriad touches of word and deed, and the teachings ascribed to Him, have claimed the supreme homage of the most princely minds and hearts. Jesus of Nazareth, after the progress of over eighteen centuries, still dwells upon unapproachable heights of lonely uniqueness, as the highest conceivable ideal of moral perfection. His teachings still throw all others into eclipse, although these have borrowed from Him much that glows with moral light. Did the lowly Galileans to whom the Gospels are ascribed, with no natural fitness for the task, forestall and surpass the progress of the best moral and religious thought of nineteen centuries? Were they, in the midst of the degradation of an evil age and the low level of its thinking, able to invent a character which has shone out in supreme splendor through all the ages since, and which is still like the sun before which the stars pale and vanish? They are just the men to give the simple straight forward record of a life that was lived before them, and of teachings which fell from the lips of one standing to them as these very Gospels say Jesus did, so that both might shine out in unperturbed radiance. But for them, or much more for others whose very names have been forgotten, or whom the church never knew, as some hold, to have produced such a character and teachings, or to have given touches of perfection to a life and teaching less perfect, is as unthinkable as that men who had the moral and religious instincts which made them capable of creating such a character and teachings should have perpetrated the most stupendous conceivable fraud upon an unsuspecting world.

Neither will the evolution idea help explain the Jesus of the Gospels and the teachings ascribed to Him if we deny that He and His life and teachings were as there declared. If possible this explanation is more unthinkable than the one just noticed. It assumes that the perfection of the portraiture and teaching was achieved gradually as accretions containing much that was mythical gathered round a life and teaching of less perfect mold. To explain the symmetry and perfection of the character and teaching of our Lord in this way appears to me more impossible than that a succession of painters, none of whom had marked genius, should, by one giving a stroke here and another a touch there, have

transformed an ordinary painting into a *Sistine Madonna*, where colors blend to form the masterpiece of art. Nay, it is as though the very dust and grime which once covered this grandest work of art had assisted to give it its perfection.

It must also be remembered that the best liberal as well as conservative scholarship agrees in holding that the earliest Gospel, which largely fixed the portraiture and reputed life and teaching of Christ, was sent out not later than thirty-five years after the Divine tragedy on Calvary, and that Paul had ended his toils and penned his last letter and gone on to his crown in less than thirty-three years after our Lord cried "It is finished," and died. All the alleged accretions around His real life and teachings, which are said to have materially changed both, must have taken place during the lifetime of many of those who knew the facts, including most of the apostles themselves. Here, then, we must have had apostles whose devout reverence for their Master would have made them keen-sighted to notice all perversion, and who were sealing their testimony to His life and teaching with their blood; here we have the whole church of this early time that had abandoned dependence upon other faiths, and had entrusted the priceless treasures of their eternal hopes to the teaching and work of Christ; here, also, we have Paul in this passage, and perhaps more strongly in others, speaking of truth as in Jesus as a recognized touchstone to determine the claims of all other teaching, and therefore as of an established and changeless body of truth, and yet we are to suppose gradual perversion of the facts of Christ's life and of His teaching was going on all the time. With the most unspeakable reasons to notice perversions, did they take place, or to protest, were they noticed, they either did not see what men are now seeing through the dim distance of over eighteen centuries, or they all entered into a conspiracy of silence while men were tampering with the very heartstrings of their faith. At the end of about thirty years the transformed picture of Christ and what He did and taught had become settled as the true representation of the real life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Compared with this the gradual change of *Magna Charta* during the lifetime of the sturdy old barons who wrested it from the king, while in their custody and

under their charge, or the gradual perversion of the charter of McMaster University while in the continuous watch-care of its Senate and Board of Governors, would be quite credible. The truth is, this is an attempt to revive a modification of the mythical theory of Strauss when the dates of the New Testament writing have been proved to have been so early as to leave it without any foundation.

Until, therefore, those who would discredit the Gospels as we have them can give a better explanation of their origin than any yet attempted, we can still hold them with the fullest conviction of head and heart. We can stand and fairly face the microscopic criticism and the pre-judgments of the time, and not quail or flinch. We may indignantly resent any charge of shutting our eyes to evidence and blindly clinging to a belief whose foundations have been eaten away, because we do not wish to be thrown into the despair of giving up that upon which we have staked our destiny. There may be hard tests of faith in the Gospels, but for these records to have been produced under the circumstances of the time when they were sent forth, and to have been other than true records, would have been a greater miracle than any they speak of. So long as this be so we need not have our faith shaken. Some eyes may be blinded by the dust raised by those who are attacking their foundations, but to those who are clear and steady eyed they will be seen to abide sure.

But allowing that we have truth as in Jesus of which we are certain, this first question is followed by a second:—

II. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS TRUTH AS IN JESUS?

All agree that our Lord laid down ethical principles which cover all the relations of human life and search down to the very moral heart of all being and doing. Neither are there many who would care to deny that He was the complete embodiment of these perfect moral principles in character, and the expression of them in life, and thus became the ideal of excellence for all the generations since.

But when we come to the question whether He did a work for men as well as set them the highest example of

life and being, there is not unanimity. In the movement of thought "back to Christ" there is much in which all may well rejoice. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact, however, that the impulse of this movement, in the case of all too many, is to get rid of the apostolic testimony and teaching as to His person and work. It is not only to get back to Christ, it is to get away from Paul and John and Peter. It is away from the Apostles as trustworthy interpreters of whom Christ was and of what He did. It is leading to a modified Unitarianism, as Christ's deity is virtually denied, in most cases, by denying any clear distinction between the Divine and the human along the line of monistic thought. It is also issuing in the denial of His substitutionary and atoning work. Unless the great mass of Christians in all ages have been deluded, this is perilous to the very vitals of all soul-saving and sanctifying truth. It assumes that there is either a contradiction between what was taught by Christ and by His apostles, so that we must either reject the latter, or, at least, that the apostles are not authoritative expounders of the meaning of His work for mankind, and need not be followed.

A glance at a few considerations bearing upon this phase of present-day thought.

Nene can deny that the apostles had the most blessed opportunities of knowing our Lord and His thought of Himself and of His work. During those wonderful three years in which they were with Him by night and by day in the freedom of sacred and hallowed fellowship, what views they must have had of His fathomless heart, what visions of His perfections shining out through word and deed and spirit! Allow that their eyes were holden; allow they were stubbornly set on a false idea of His mission; allow that there was much they were not yet able to receive. But still, in our Lord's human loneliness and longing for sympathy; in His desire to prepare them for what was drawing near, He must often have let words fall, which, in the clearer light of the cross and empty grave became luminous with the highest meaning. Some of these are recorded in the Gospels, but there were many more, doubtless, in His unrecorded teachings to which John refers. Especially did our Lord, we are told, explain to His disciples more fully the import of His work after His resurrection, at the only time when it could be done

effectually, when that work had been crowned by His death on the cross.

Let us couple with this their adoring reverence for Him which had been growing during His life, and which became a hallowed awe through His death and resurrection. This adoring reverence and awe, as made manifest in their addresses and writings, could not have been given to a creature largely of their own imaginations. It must have been with them from the time He left them, and could have grown only as they believed they were entering more fully into the truth about Him.

Is it conceivable, with the reverence and awe upon them which led even a doubting Thomas to exclaim, "My Lord and my God," that they would have dared give forth mere speculations about Him, or anything of which they were not certain with an absolute certainty? Would they have even harbored the thought of putting their own teachings into His lips or under theegis of His authority? Would they have ventured this especially when they knew how sternly He had forbidden this very thing? They must have been infinitely careful not to misinterpret His own thought of Himself and of His mission. To do this would have appeared the most awful sacrilege, from which they would have shrunk with unspeakable dread and loathing.

They also evidently entrusted their eternal destiny to the truth of their interpretation of our Lord and of His work. They all had abandoned the faith of their fathers, rendered sacred to them through the associations of the past history of their people. They were willing to suffer ostracism and persecution, not only in bearing witness to the fact of the resurrection of Christ, but also for the sake of their interpretation of what His life and death meant for men. They stood before blazing-eyed mobs of Jews, and declared that in Him was the only hope of salvation. Facing heathen multitudes with doubt and sin and despair in their hearts, they met their eager or hopeless gaze with the message of what they conceived to be the import of Christ's life and death. They seem to be certain with a certainty which permits no tremor of doubt. They are oppress by the fatefulness to themselves and the world of the message they have to give. The name of Jesus is the only one in which there is salvation. To preach any

other Gospel than the one they proclaim makes accursed. They are sure with the certainty which alone can justify them in asking men cowering beneath the tremendous thought of their immortality and possible destiny to entrust all the possibilities of eternity upon their teaching. For them, under these circumstances, to have sought to make men depend upon their teaching about Christ, when the issues of life and death eternal were felt to be involved, if they had nothing better than their own surmises about Him to depend upon, would have stamped them the veriest frauds and wretches the world has ever seen, rather than the noble and genuine souls their lives of self-sacrifice and suffering proved them to be.

Whence then this certainty in the face of such tests as these, and their agreement in their preaching and teaching as to the person and work of Christ which they flung down into the seething waters of religious belief and philosophic speculation, and asked a trembling, doubting and despairing world to step out upon it as the very rock of ages which could not be shaken by time nor stricken from beneath their feet by angel or demon? Can we believe it brought about in any other way than through what they have learned of Him? Their assurance was based upon what they knew of His thought of Himself and His work, either through His own teaching or the consciousness of the infallible illumination of the Spirit of Christ.

Instead, therefore, of going back from Paul and Peter and John, as many would have us, let us go forward from the record of Christ's life and work to the apostles' testimony as the authoritative interpretation of Him and His work which could only be affectively accomplished when the work was done. To the man who studies the Gospels and the Epistles fairly, the teaching of the apostles will be found to be but the fuller explanation of what our Lord taught in germ, as it took on its full meaning in the light of the cross and Joseph's new tomb. With some knowledge of the hair-splitting criticism and sifting to which the New Testament is being subjected, am I blind or impelled by prejudice when I say that I have the most restful assurance that Paul, and Peter, and John, and James, knew more about our Lord and His thought of Himself and His work than do all those together who, with mutually conflicting views and surmises, would make us

doubt the trustworthiness of their testimony. The apostolic teaching was not an attempt to make their preconceived ideas run amuck through the life and teaching and word of our Lord, but a statement of what they were certain of with a Divine certainty.

But even though this be admitted, another question is pressing on behind this last. Not only is it asked what constitutes truth as in Jesus but,

III. WHAT DOES TRUTH IN JESUS CONSTITUTE?

This is the question of all questions for Christians. They have interests as high as their conceptions of heaven, as deep and dreadful as their thought of hell, and as lasting as eternity at stake. They wish to be assured that their faith is something more reliable than even the highest religion that has yet been evolved. They shrink from the thought with unutterable dread that it is to be classed with the natural religions as a mere evolution of human thought, be that thought even the best that the mind of man has ever produced, for this would rob it of the certainty of its divinity, and of all authority. I could no longer place upon it all the freightage of the hopes and possibilities of my being and be assured that I was resting them upon the might and faithfulness and very being of God who had thus become known to me with a knowledge that otherwise I could not gain.

Neither does another conception which is popular in some quarters bring a devout Christian much comfort. Unless he must, he does not care to view the New Testament as an adaptation to a passing phase of human development, which is finally to be outgrown, as man's upward progress goes on. If this be its true nature how can he be assured that he is in just that stage of progress which permits this New Testament teaching to suit his case? He looks abroad and sees men in all stages of mental and moral growth, from the lowest savage to the highest product of the most enlightened lands, and he asks, Can I be certain that this truth is for all these? If it is but an adjustment to a certain stage in human development, surely this single truth cannot be best adapted to all men, and I am still in doubt whether it still applies to me or ever did. And he must still face the tremendous possibilities of his being in doubt and distrust.

With trembling interest he still asks the question, is the truth of the New Testament like the wax to be molded into adjustment to the changing thought and progress of the fleeting ages, or is it the mold which is to adjust thought and character to itself, because it is changeless as God, through being from Him, and a transcript of His eternal thought and immutable nature?

There can be no doubt that our Lord and New Testament writers thought they were giving truth which should be final, and not a passing adjustment to a fleeting need. Our Lord was sure that Heaven and earth might pass away, but neither the law nor His word should pass away. As He sat over against Jerusalem, and in the great commission, He declared the one Gospel should continue to be preached till the end of the age. Paul with his burning ardor to bless men could hurl the most terrible curse upon those who would preach any other than this one Gospel. For cultured Greek, religious Jew, practical Roman, ignorant barbarian, this Gospel was thought equally fitted. To him, Christ in all the features of His character, in all the truth of which He was the centre and soul, was the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Kingdoms might rise and fall, philosophies might chase each other across the theatre of human thought, but this truth of Christ and Christ of truth would abide forever. There was no thought that the religion of Jesus was merely the highest yet evolved. It was the highest which should ever bless the world. It was the sun of truth which should never go down behind the western hills or be outshone into vanishing, by any evolution or even revelation.

But admit this was the idea our Lord and New Testament writers had of their teachings, and what then? Were they inspired, I care not in what sense, can we believe they would have been left to think their teaching the final truth, when it was not, and the time would come when they must give place to something better for a better and higher age? For this would mean, when that time came, the very authoritative teaching which had been ordained to bind heart and life during previous long-drawn centuries would be the authority for rejecting the new as a false intruder. This would be to charge God Himself with riveting upon a succeeding age the shackles of an effete faith.

Even allow that our Lord and Scripture writers gave

only the highest teachings which have yet been evolved by merely human thought, and that there has been no rift in the veil which enshrouded the world save what human hands have torn open, and still the difficulty remains. If they could have an utterly false idea as to the finality of their teaching, are not their teachings as well as they as teachers utterly discredited? This is something more than ignorance of the nature of their teaching as to whether they were final for the ages. They were apparently as certain that they were final as that they were true for the age then present. If they had a false impression of the one, why not of the other, and we may close our New Testaments and look with heart-breaking questioning into the darkened heavens which give no answering gleam of assured light.

But may we not rather reason that those whose teachings are acknowledged to have been the highest the world has ever known, however they were enabled to produce them, would be utterly incapable of asserting that their teachings were final when they were not absolutely certain that they were so? With all due deference, I am sure those who have given us the crowning teachings of the ages up to now are much better judges of their own productions as regards finality than are those who have made but small contribution, or no contribution, to the world's capital of truth.

It is significant that the writers of the Old Testament make no such claim of finality to their teachings. They are ever looking forward and expecting clearer and fuller light. At the end of the progress they made, the last of them have their eyes fixed toward the future as men at the dawn are looking for the rising sun. Now for our Lord and New Testament writers, in view of the example of the prophets of their people whom they revered, to have claimed that their teachings were the final visions of the Divine which the straining eyes of the devout were ever to see, when they were not absolutely sure, would stamp them as too reckless to permit us to accept them as even reliable teachers, much less accept Christ as their Lord.

Men cannot play fast and loose with Him and His claims for Himself and what he taught. They cannot say his is the highest manifestation of God, be it either by revelation or evolution, and accept a large part of what

he taught, and then deny that he knew the nature of his own teachings. To deny his statement that his teachings are abiding and final leads straight to the rejection of Him as what he claimed to be and of all His teachings as authoritative.

But back of all questionings on this subject is the assured conviction that the essence of all truth is unchanging and eternal, because it must be the expression of God's changeless nature and relations. The great central facts of man's being and needs are also abiding. For all time he is a moral, responsible agent. For all time the natures of all men have proved themselves essentially the same. The inner principles of truth, although they were only an adjustment to the inner and deeper needs of men's souls, could and would still be abiding, for once adapted they would be adapted for all time. Only in forms of expression, not in essential reality, would there be change.

For over eighteen centuries truth as in Jesus has been in the world. It has been accepted by men of all nations and of all conditions of poverty or riches, of enlightenment or barbarism, of culture or ignorance, and during all these ages, with all their stir of thought and change of view in other things, no one has had the hardihood to claim that he has surpassed it. Not a single principle laid down by Him, not a single doctrine from His lips, has had to be rejected through subsequent growth of ethical or religious thought. Not one has had to be discounted, even. Not one has been rendered obsolete. May we not add to this fact, which impressed Romans so powerfully, that not one principle of truth has been added to the truth as in Jesus during all these long-stretching centuries. Surely if this were not the standard of truth for all time—if it were at some time to be superseded by higher truth—we should have had some of this higher truth come forth before this. If it is ever to give place to something else, we should surely have had some of its principles outgrown before now. If it were not the final adjustment and revelation of truth to man's needs, should we not have found something better fitted for this purpose ere this? Under these circumstances may we not conclude that if the religion of Jesus has maintained its supremacy and has been adapted to all nations and conditions during all this time, it has proved its claim to

be the final truth in relation to God and sin and salvation and human destiny. At least, until some new principle of truth not contained in the New Testament is found, until some of its principles have been outgrown or rendered obsolete, we will still hold these old teachings in undiminished confidence, undisturbed by the restless chafings of lower levels and tides of thought.

The final question which would have to be discussed to make our treatment complete is too vast to be more than mentioned. It is:—

IV. IS TRUTH AS IN JESUS PERVERTED BY THE INTERPRETATION WHICH HAS PREVAILED AMONG US?

There are two great doctrines which must abide if we are still to have a Gospel. Rob us of the Deity of our Lord, and the heart of truth is gone. Rob us of the doctrine of the vicarious expiation of our Lord, and the whole of truth about sin and righteousness and salvation is maimed. We must not allow men to rob us of a Divine Christ by exalting human nature to the stature of the Divine, and thus leaving Him human still. We must not allow a far-fetched interpretation, shaped through other than the plainest meaning of the Scriptures, to rob us of the cross, or rob the cross of its glory and power. If Christ were not God, or if He did not bear our sins for us, then there is no manifestation of God's love which makes angels and devils wonder and draws estranged hearts to His feet. If Christ did not offer Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice, there is no revelation in the cross of the inviolable righteousness of God and the guilt of sin which is fitted to subdue the soul into penitence. If the cross is but a place of martyrdom, then it ceases to be the very power-house of motive for a service and sacrifice unto death. Cast doubt upon these blessed doctrines and a growing and deadly paralysis will fall upon all our energies and enterprises, as hearts grow cold and enthusiasm wanes. These are the doctrines of a rising or a falling church. Tear them away from the confidence of men, and untold thousands would be thrown into hopeless skepticism, as their most sacred experiences, which were based upon the truth of these great doctrines, were proved delusive and false. Take them away and the New Testament is little more than a code of morals and ethical ex-

ampies which leave sinful men without a Saviour, and the greatest craving of the soul for a way of salvation which will satisfy itself unmet.

But these doctrines will never be wrested away. They are woven into the texture of the Bible. They are embedded in the most certain and hallowed of Christian experiences. The cross cannot cease to be the very interpreter of God as it casts the most glowing light over all His attributes.

Let us live in its light. Let us continually keep ourselves under the electric thrill of its power. Let us depend upon the truths associated with it for motive power for all that we attempt, and as the medium of Divine power to save and sanctify men. Doing this, the energy from God will flow out through all our work, and it will triumph gloriously.